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Work being done within the United Nations system on improving quantitative and qualitative indicators on social conditions and standards of living

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCITON

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1989/72, entitled "World social situation". In that resolution, the Council requested the Secretary General to submit a report to the forty-sixth session of the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, on "the work being done within the United Nations system to improve and further develop quantitative and qualitative indicators that measure accurately the social condition and the standards of living of the world's population, particularly in developing countries". That request arose from the Council's desire that the analysis and dissemination of data on the world social situation be increased and more broadly diffused. The Council also requested that the next report on the world social situation include an analysis of the main indicators of social progress and standards of living, and of the trends in those indicators.

2. The resolution reflects the wide interest nationally and internationally in improving and further refining social indicators. Much of this interest has to do with the gathering of information and monitoring of progress in areas of priority concern to Governments and the international community, such as human resources development, the eradication of poverty, the social costs of structural adjustment and the monitoring of international activities and events corresponding to the socio-economic mandates and objectives adopted by intergovernmental bodies. Because aggregate economic indicators provide limited information on social conditions, attention has mainly been focused on developing, expanding and improving sets of social indicators relevant to policy analysis in areas of socio-economic concern. This demand for new and more refined social indicators has also been fueled by advances in microcomputer-based information-processing technologies, which have speeded up the processing and analysis of data and generated further prospects for using social indicators in information and decision-making.

3. The preparation of the present report draws on the findings and conclusions of the twenty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission, held from 4 to 13 February 1991. Among additional sources, the report also takes into account relevant preliminary findings and background information from (a) the Human Development Report 1991, of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and (b) preparations for the Meeting of Experts on Social Development Indicators, sponsored and organized by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and the Ministry of Planning of Morocco, and held at Rabat from 8 to 11 April 1991. 1/

4. The report is concerned primarily with social indicators (as opposed to economic, physical or functional indicators) and examines the various ways in which social indicators have been developed in the United Nations system and their uses, with emphasis on recent years. For convenience, the indicator approaches used in the report are classified as follows: series of key domain indicators; multisectoral sets of indicators; model-based systems of integrated social indicators; and composite indexes. The first two approaches

consist basically of operational, input-oriented indicators corresponding to the kinds of physical or objective criteria suitable for measuring changes in living standards. The other two approaches, by virtue of fitting into explicit models on the one hand and comprising aggregated measures in the other, are more output-oriented and thus are better suited for measuring general changes in social conditions. The first two approaches, moreover, are attuned mainly to programme management and decision-making requirements, while the latter two contribute for the most part to the realms of social knowledge and policy analysis, and only indirectly to operational decisions. In practice, all four approaches have made extensive use of quantitative, that is, objective indicators in measuring both quantitative and qualitative phenomena. For reasons explained below, virtually no work has been carried on in the United Nations system with respect to qualitative indicators, that is, subjective or perceptual measures of individual well-being.

5. Because of its relatively short and recent history, rapid evolution and lack of a strong underlying conceptual framework based on theory, the field of social indicators is marked by persistent terminological confusion that has led to a rather loose use and understanding of the term. Typically, for example, semantic confusion may arise over what social indicators are and are not, how they differ from social statistics, what is the difference between quantitative and qualitative indicators, and so on. Accordingly, before proceeding to a discussion of efforts in the United Nations system to improve social indicators, it is important first to address briefly the issue of what is meant by social indicators in the present report.

II. HISTORY, CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF SOCIAL INDICATORS

6. Social indicators, as conventionally defined, 2/ are statistics of direct normative interest that facilitate the process of arriving at a concise, comprehensive and balanced judgement about social conditions. Generally, they help reduce abstract and unmeasurable concepts into surrogate components that lend themselves more readily to measurement. Social indicators accordingly have two important characteristics: they are surrogates and they are measures. Implicitly or explicitly, moreover, they postulate some theory of social behaviour that serves to relate the variables under consideration.

7. Most definitions of social indicators tend to emphasize output measures more than input measures, on the grounds that the volume of inputs applied to specific problems cannot be taken as suitable proxies for outputs because of the host of other factors that may also have an effect. In practice, however, the scope of social indicators is generally perceived in the United Nations system as including measures of input, throughput, intermediate output and final output. For example, in the health sector, social indicators may be seen as including input measures, such as the number of doctors per capita; throughput measures, such as the number of vaccinations made; intermediate output measures, such as extension of life expectancy or reduction in infant mortality; and final output measures, such as subjective responses on the quality of health. The broader notion of social indicators, encompassing

output and input variables presumed to be related to them, is that utilized in the present report.

8. The origins of the social indicator movement are intimately tied to the long-standing concern of Governments to measure social and living conditions and trends. The indicator movement grew out of the concept of externalities in welfare economics and was given major international impetuses, first by the holding of a United Nations expert group meeting on the subject in 1954, and subsequently when research on living standards was promoted following recommendations of the World Employment Conference organized by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1976 that the primary objective of development should be the satisfaction of basic needs. Shortly thereafter, the World Bank initiated work on indicators to determine the level of resources required to meet core basic needs over a specific period, as well as its possible role in meeting those needs. Other national and international efforts also contributed in significant ways to the progress made in developing and improving social indicators.

9. Over the years, the social indicator movement spread to many areas of inquiry and came to encompass a wide variety of methodological approaches. By the beginning of the 1990s, both basic data compilation and indicators development had reached a high degree of sophistication, as the United Nations system and Governments in developed and developing countries sought effective ways of being informed on population trends, health and education levels, employment conditions, social expenditures and their output, and so on. In many cases, moreover, indicators were integrated into larger systems of measurement in order to enhance their contribution to analysis and policy-making. One of the challenges sometimes facing researchers and decision makers, therefore, has been to know when, under what circumstances and how to use the wide variety of indicator approaches available to them.

10. Since the concepts underlying social conditions represent a synthesis of various aspects of well-being and the circumstances that affect it, the measurement of social conditions can be approached from different perspectives. Likewise, the distinctive ways in which social indicators may be applied to social conditions can result in quite different findings, with questions concerning the relative validity of the various conclusions often difficult to resolve. Different conclusions in particular may arise depending on whether quantitative or qualitative indicator approaches are utilized.

11. The distinction between quantitative and qualitative indicators is useful to note, not only for the above reason but also because the two are singled out for review by the resolution requesting the preparation of the present report, and because the United Nations system has given unequal consideration to the two. Generally speaking, both indicator approaches are conceptually derived and have quantitative inputs. Quantitative indicators, however, are variables that facilitate counting the occurrences of a given social phenomenon, whereas qualitative indicators are concerned with reports from individuals about their feelings, perceptions and responses. In addition, the quantitative approach defines social conditions and standards of living in

terms of goods and services thought to contribute to desired states of existence, while the qualitative conceptualization allows individuals to define for themselves the quality of their lives. In other words, the former considers its value framework as given and more or less self-evident, whereas the latter recognizes the plurality and relativity of value frameworks and perspectives on any given social situation. Since neither form of indicator alone is able to give a fully accurate portrayal of reality, in many social situations they are better used together.

12. In their work on social indicators, the organizations of the United Nations system have focused mainly on improving ways of objectively measuring living conditions, based on quantitative indicators corresponding to each of the components of living conditions and the resources used by Governments and households to acquire them. As already pointed out, little systematic work has been carried out within or between United Nations agencies to develop and refine social indicators that might better reflect the subjective elements of well-being. The main reason for this is evident: given the economic, social and cultural heterogeneity of population groups within countries, not to mention across countries, any given objective condition can elicit very different subjective responses from different individuals, thus producing often weak correlations between objective indicators and the subjective responses of population subgroups. As a result, United Nations involvement in developing and applying qualitative indicators has been confined mainly to grass-roots-level studies of United Nations-supported pilot projects. However, as pointed out in the conclusions of the report, there are various intensely complex social areas of national and international concern and inquiry that, because they cannot be reduced to simple quantitative terms, would benefit from global research and analyses based on a judicious use of qualitative indicators.

III. INDICATORS ON SOCIAL SECTORS AND POPULATION SUBGROUPS

13. Most of the social indicator sets that have been developed by United Nations organizations reflect those organizations' domains of sectoral or social-group competence and responsibility. In recent years, many organizations in the United Nations system have been actively engaged in devising sets of indicators for monitoring nationally and, for comparative purposes, globally the progress achieved by Governments in meeting the goals and targets laid down in plans of action corresponding to international years, world declarations and decade-long strategies on issues of international concern. The value of these progress-oriented indicators to the measurement of social conditions and standards of living lies in their attempts to operationalize and measure some of the components of a multidimensional conceptualization of welfare. Inasmuch as many social indicators are closely related, the consideration of several together and the complementarity between some of them has been one of the major contributions of progress-oriented indicators to attempts at measuring changes in overall living conditions. The same is true of recent efforts to develop cross-sectoral indicators on population subgroups, such as women in particular (see below).

14. General reviews of the wide field of social indicators have been compiled in recent years by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and the Statistical Office of the Secretariat. 3/ Between them, they provide an overview of national and international approaches, concepts and programmes in social indicators up to the time each was published; set out frameworks for selecting and compiling social indicators; and examine the methodological aspects of using social indicators to measure and analyse socio-economic development.

15. In a number of instances, United Nations organizations working jointly have concentrated on developing social indicators in relatively specialized fields. This has been the case, for example, in sectoral areas of mutual concern, such as the Inter-Agency Food and Nutritional Surveillance Programme sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Orgnaization (WHO) and convened through the Subcommittee on Nutrition of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. The Surveillance Programme has proposed the following nutritional status indicators as basic outcome indicators: birth weight, weight-for-age of children under five and height-for-age of primary school entrants. 4/ Also, as shown below, cooperation within the United Nations system is taking place between the Statistical Office and other United Nations entities that are responsible for implementing plans of action but lack statistical and indicator experience for devising suitable monitoring indicators. There also exist examples of cooperation in establishing strengthened field data collection capacity, such as the collaboration between the Statistical Office's National Household Survey Capability Programme and the World Bank's Social Dimensions of Adjustment Programme. Finally, as described below, a number of United Nations bodies are collaborating in proposing ways of integrating the indicator requirements of the various international plans of action so as to reduce the additional burden faced by developing countries in gathering data for the proposed indicators.

16. The above examples of inter-agency cooperation notwithstanding, the main responsibility for keeping track of global progress in implementing sectoral plans of action rests typically with the corresponding sector agencies in the United Nations system. Their monitoring domains have often been broad and their approaches eclectic. An example is FAO's development of social indicators to help Governments report on their progress in implementing the Programme of Action adopted in 1979 by the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development. 5/ FAO's primary indicators in monitoring the WCARRD Programme of Action cover the areas of alleviation of poverty; access to land, water and other natural resources; access of producers to inputs, markets, training and extension; development of non-farm activities; institutional aspects of education, training and extension services; and growth in the agricultural sector and in population. The FAO guidelines also stress the need to disaggregate indicators by socio-economic groups, age and sex in order to assess the impact of the policies and programmes of the World Conference on different groups and improve the targeting of public interventions for the rural poor.

17. There are other significant examples as well of United Nations efforts to improve and strengthen indicators related to specific international plans of action. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), for instance, is currently engaged in helping countries monitor and evaluate their progress in implementing the objectives of the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000. Measures proposed in that connection include quantitative indicators on land tenure, shelter affordability and employment generation in the shelter sector. In cooperation with the World Bank and UNDP, moreover, Habitat has been developing indicators on shelter quality and on the urban environment.

18. The broadest and perhaps most complex area for identifying, interpreting and developing social indicators has been the environment. In general, the task of converting science-based information systems into social indicators is fraught with difficulties. As the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development approaches, however, interest and activity in creating suitable indicators in this area has grown rapidly. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and, on an interregional basis, the Statistical Office of the Secretariat have been working towards the development of environmental indicators, while the Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has been invaluable as a global information base for the development of corresponding indicators. 6/ In addition to the urban indicators work noted in the preceding paragraph, important areas for socially oriented environmental indicators include human health in terms of contaminated or polluted air, water and food; environmental-related accidents and natural disasters; and collective and individual human responses, such as out-migration from ecologically degraded or fragile areas, changes in consumer behaviour and lifestyle, and so on.

19. Along more specifically sectoral lines, WHO has compiled, and assisted Governments in obtaining, health status indicators and indicators of the provision of health care that are relevant to monitoring national and international progress in attaining the targets of the Global Strategy of Health for All by the Year 2000. 7/ While a list of 12 core indicators was agreed upon by the World Health Assembly, additional indicators have been adopted by the regional committees of four of the six WHO regions. WHO was also instrumental in devising indicators for monitoring global progress in achieving the targets established in the framework of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. 8/

20. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been continuing its work on developing concepts and methods for cultural indicators within the UNESCO framework for cultural statistics. 9/ Together with UNICEF, it is also engaged in developing indicators for monitoring the goals and targets proposed in the Framework for Action adopted by the World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs in 1990. 10/ These refer to early childhood care and development, universal access to and completion of primary education, learning achievement, adult literacy and provision of basic education in other essential skills.

21. ILO has continued its work on the collection of labour statistics as well as on the development of international standards for the collection of labour statistics. It is also engaged in the development of indicators to monitor new labour market processes and vulnerable groups such as the self-employed, low-paid workers, women and workers in the informal sector.

22. Many of the new developments in social indicators have taken place in conjunction with international activities and events having various subgroups of the population as their focal concern. 11/ These events include the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, the World Assembly and International Plan of Action on Ageing, the celebration in 1985 of the International Youth Year, and the 1990 Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Developm/ t of Children. A number of important advances have been made in elaborating indicators on social groups, and in particular on women. Pursuant to the World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year in 1975, for example, a series of United Nations sales publications has been prepared and issued on indicators concerning the situation of women, and on their role in development. 12/ This work was carried out by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the Statistical Office of the Secretariat, in cooperation with the United Nations Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. With respect to the goals of the World Declaration on Children for the 1990s, UNICEF is in the process of developing indicators relating to child survival, development and protection, and of reviewing supporting indicators in such related areas as women's health and education, nutrition, child health, water and sanitation, basic education and children in difficult circumstances. 13/ New programmes of indicator development are also under consideration with respect to the elderly and the disabled. 14/

23. For all the United Nations system's efforts to improve existing indicators and, as necessary, devise new ones, there remain severe problems in most developing countries of gathering and analysing the corresponding statistical data on a reliable, frequent and timely basis. A generally serious lack of observable data, for example, has been found in relation to the following indicators: percentage of dwellings with potable drinking-water and/or sanitary facilities; percentage of population with reasonable access to primary health centres; percentage of children who are malnourished; morbidity rates; and so on. In some instances where observation-based statistical data exist only on a partial and occasional basis, United Nations agencies have tried to bridge the gap by using estimates. An example of a tool for such purposes is the MORTPACK software developed by the Population Division of the Secretariat for mortality estimations. While estimates have generally been useful in giving quantitative assessments of the prevailing conditions of many countries in fields where they lack detailed, timely data, their utilization for up-to-date monitoring and policy purposes poses severe problems. 15/ In many instances, moreover, pervasive problems of sampling and non-sampling errors further complicate analysis.

24. The statistical problems that exist in many developing countries in compiling social indicators is a matter of utmost concern. The recent review by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development of the compiling of improved social indicators in Côte d'Ivoire, India, Kenya and Morocco provides a glimpse of the problems that can exist even in countries with long and extensive experience in social statistics and indicator research, or which have benefited from recent, large-scale external assistance in this area. 16/ In recognition of the potentially heavy statistical needs in Member States for monitoring progress towards international social goals in the 1990s, a working group composed of UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNDP and the Statistical Office of the Secretariat has, as already mentioned, set itself the task of devising an integrated, consolidated approach to implementing the monitoring processes. That approach is being undertaken in collaboration with national Governments and is expected to provide a sufficiently broad framework for other international organizations to participate. Initially, attention will be focused on a limited set of indicators for which there is an urgent national policy need. A small number of countries will serve as pilot tests for determining the best methodology and strategy for gathering the necessary statistics. The approach will thus be concerned mainly with ascertaining the availability and quality of each targeted indicator, the nature and extent of existing gaps, and the resources needed to close those gaps.

IV. MODEL-BASED SYSTEMS OF INTEGRATED SOCIAL INDICATORS

25. While most of the indicator-related work in the United Nations system has been concerned with the development of single and multiple domain indicators, there also exist examples of indicators being developed as components of explicit conceptual models of social systems. For example, the Statistical Office's project entitled "Towards a System of Social and Demographic Statistics" (SSDS) and the ILO and World Bank's more economic-oriented social accounting matrices represent attempts in the 1970s at devising social accounting frameworks comparable to national income accounts. The Statistical Office's model consisted of linking individuals' life-cycle achievements, or self-actualization, with various institutional aspects of government expenditure. 17/ Social accounting matrices focused on identifying different types of households, modelled how they earn and spend their money, and examined the effects of changing levels and structures of production on income distribution and household consumption. 18/ The analytical and data collection demands made by project and the matrices, however, proved difficult for most developing countries to satisfy. As a result, the project has been reoriented to work on simpler social indicators and the social accounting matrices have been applied in a few developing countries mainly as an element of the World Bank's living standards measurement study (see below).

26. Despite the mixed record of these earlier efforts, interest in devising model-based systems of integrated social indicators remains high. This interest in analytical indicators is driven in part by concern over the growing incidence of poverty in many developing countries, as well as the

likely negative impact of structural adjustment programmes on many of the poor and most vulnerable segments of the population.

27. Analytical indicators form an important part of the social dimensions of adjustment project launched in sub-Saharan Africa in 1987 by the World Bank, with support from UNDP. 19/ That project has built upon survey methods and indicators tested under the living standards measurement study initiated by the World Bank in 1980. The model, or conceptual foundation, of the social dimensions of adjustment project assumes that the effects of adjustment and other macro-economic changes affect households through markets and the social and economic infrastructure. Accordingly, indicators have been employed as parts of a hierarchical information system at the macro-, meso- and micro- or household levels. Those indicators have been devised for a wide variety of issues and topics, including the reasons for malnutrition; the determinants of school enrolment ratios; the quality of education; household saving behaviour; income inequality and various characteristics of the poor; and the distributional impact of user fees. The social indicators that have mainly been used are ones that are more likely to respond quickly to external changes, that is, student drop-out rates as opposed to literacy rates.

28. The conceptual foundation and indicators of the project were developed at World Bank headquarters in order that the empirical work be consistent and comparable across countries. Moreover, in view of the limitations of the established statistical systems in many of the countries participating in the project, the World Bank has relied heavily on foreign consultants to ensure the timely gathering and processing of quality data. A problem with this approach could be that the countries' capacity to continue the statistical and indicator approaches introduced by the World Bank may end once the project is over.

29. Another area in which the United Nations system has been active recently in developing model-based systems of social indicators is in measuring the incidence of poverty. The traditional approach to measuring poverty has been to calculate an income poverty line based on the specification of a minimum calorie intake and its corresponding cost, which is then multiplied by some factor to take account of non-food items also necessary for subsistence living. In view of the diversified nature of poverty, however, the income-based approach to measurement has been criticized for its narrow economic and physiological basis in deriving poverty lines and for ignoring the role that access, or lack thereof, to publicly supplied basic needs and services, which are often free-of-charge or subsidized, could play in poverty determination. According to this broader interpretation of poverty, income-based poverty lines underestimate the incidence of poverty because they concentrate on private, recurrent consumption and thus disregard unsatisfied basic needs corresponding to government-supplied social services and investment in infrastructure.

30. Pursuant to a decision originating from the Declaration of the First Regional Conference on Poverty, held at Cartagena, Colombia, in 1988, UNDP and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) undertook

a joint regional project to develop a system of social indicators for better measuring the incidence of poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean. The integrated poverty measurement method, as it has been called, 20/ consisted first of developing indicators of unsatisfied basic needs. A number of indicators applicable to housing quality, access to primary schools and dependency ratios were identified with the assistance of the FAO office in ECLAC, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the Regional Employment Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean (PREALC) office of ILO, WHO/Pan American Health Organization, UNESCO and UNICEF.

31. The unsatisfied basic needs indicators determine the levels below which households are considered not to have access to basic needs. Because the satisfaction of each need is to some extent conditioned by the satisfaction of others, a household is considered poor if it scores an inadequate level in any of the needs in the model. In other words, the method does not allow for substitution between different needs, which also means that the dimensions of the model may not be aggregated and weighted on a single scale - a topic that is discussed below.

32. In the integrated poverty measurement method, the unsatisfied basic needs measurement and the income-based poverty line measurement are viewed as complementary. Hence, when applied simultaneously, the total incidence of poverty results from the union of the two sets of measures, not their intersection. 21/ Those households which are classified as poor under both measurement methods are typically chronically poor, while those deemed poor only by the income-based line include many of the occasional and newly poor. When mapping the geographical distribution of poverty in accordance with the use of integrated poverty measurement variables and census data, policy-helpful information is gained not only on how poor the population is, but also in what aspects people are poor and where suitable corrective interventions can be undertaken.

V. COMPOSITE INDEXES

33. In parallel with the efforts made over the years to identify and collect information on selected indicators, attempts have on occasion also been made to develop composite indexes, or constructs of weighted, composite indicators, to throw light on levels and trends in general living conditions. These indexes have usually been the product of attempts at giving a broader view of the human condition than is available from GDP per capita figures, but because of subjective weighting criteria and the synthetic nature of the measures used, they often give rise to problems of interpretation.

34. In 1970, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development experimented with developing a system of living standard indexes that avoided monetary units altogether and consisted more of summary statements than of selected social indicators as such. The Institute's general development index, as well as the corresponding sets of measures, were not intended simply to be complements of GDP, but substitute measures of development in the

combined economic and social sense of the word. Moreover, the index did not assign absolute levels to each country in domains such as education and health, but rather the country's level in those fields relative to its general level of social and economic development. The index was based on 18 socio-economic indicators for 58 developing and developed countries. 22/

35. As with social indicators in general, analytical interest in the development and use of summary or composite indicators has surged in recent years. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, UNDP and ECLAC have developed a social progress index that links together measures defining the degree of national development with indicators of population welfare and of the quantity and quality of life. 23/ A less complex index is the human development index (HDI), which is highlighted in the UNDP annual human development reports. 24/ The latter index consists of three equally weighted indicators: life expectancy, literacy and per capita GDP adjusted for purchasing power parity. Countries are ranked in the index according to their relative performances in the three indicators, which are averaged to obtain each country's composite standing in the scale. The human development index thus provides profiles of countries at different levels of development and with different socio-economic systems, which facilitate fruitful investigations into the relationship between the level, rates and patterns of economic growth and social progress.

36. Adjustments in the 1991 human development index indicator series include (a) the incorporation of mean years of education into the literacy indicator, at half the weight given to literacy; and (b) modifying per capita GDP calculations by including incomes above the estimated poverty line of $US 4,861, but weighting the increments above the line on a sliding scale as they get higher. The reason for those adjustments is to facilitate comparisons among developed countries, that is, countries with high literacy and income levels, in terms of the performance of each one in indicators of knowledge and command over resources needed for a decent living.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

37. The United Nations system has made much progress in developing and further improving indicators for measuring social conditions and standards of living in the world. These advances have been important for gaining a better knowledge and understanding about social phenomena and for helping decision makers evaluate and improve social policies. However, certain important gaps in the development of indicators remain. More attention, for example, could be given to the development and improvement of indicators on torture, censorship, the right to assemble peacefully and other dimensions of human rights and freedom, and to integrate those indicators in model-driven analyses and in composite indexes of social conditions and human well-being. Likewise, United Nations system-wide efforts to develop and apply qualitative indicators could be instrumental in gaining more understanding and knowledge about subtle, subjective and sensitive issues having a crucial bearing on many groups' well-being, namely, ethnic or sex-related patterns of discrimination

or exploitation, meaningful social and political participation, social issues in drug trafficking and substance abuse, various dimensions of criminal behaviour and personal security, and so on.

38. The improvement and further development of social indicators on social conditions and standards of living is important to the preparation of United Nations reports on the social situation. The less aggregated the indicators, however, the better. A glance, for example, at the quadrennial reports on the world social situation of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat or the UNDP annual human development reports shows that the analyses contained in those reports are not simply culled from other indicator-based studies. Instead, much of the work in putting together such reports consists of compiling social statistics and, where appropriate and feasible, developing sets of indicators, frameworks and aggregations as needed. It is therefore important to appreciate the rationale, capabilities and limitations of indicators and their applications, and to avoid using social statistics and indicators indiscriminately for no better reason than that they are there. In that respect, moreover, the role and significance of indicators should be kept in perspective: they are only one of a number of tools and approaches to be used in preparing analytical reports on social conditions in the world.

Notes

1/ The meeting of experts was organized pursuant to requests made by the General Assembly (resolutions 40/179 and 44/234) and the Economic and Social Council (resolutions 1987/6 and 1989/4), and to recommendations made by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fourth, twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth sessions.

2/ For an extensive treatment of the subject of social indicators, see M. Bulmer, Social Measurement and Social Indicators: Issues of Policy and Theory, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1981; C. Taylor, ed., Indicator Systems for Political, Economic, and Social Analysis, Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain/Anton Hain, Cambridge, United States of America, 1980; and A. Szalai and F. Andrews, eds., The Quality of Life: Comparative Studies, Sage Studies in International Sociology 20, London, 1980.

3/ See D. McGranahan, E. Pizarro and C. Richard, Measurement and Analysis of Socio-Economic Development: An Inquiry into International Indicators of Development and Quantitative Interrelations of Social and Economic Components of Development, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, 1985; and United Nations, Handbook on Social Indicators, Series F, No. 49 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.89.XVII.6), New York, 1989.

Notes (continued)

4/ See United Nations, "Report on progress made in the development of a coordinated United Nations system database for selected social statistics and indicators of common interest and the development of related national databases" (E/CN.3/1991/20), New York, 1991, para. 17.

5/ See FAO, "Guidelines on socio-economic indicators for monitoring and evaluating agrarian reform and rural development", FAO, Rome, 1988 (mimeo).

6/ See, for example, ECE, "Draft set of ECE environmental indicators" (CES/548/Add.6/Rev.1), Geneva, 17 December 1985; and UNEP, Environmental Data Report, Alden Press, Oxford, 1989.

7/ See WHO, Development of Indicators for Monitoring Progress Towards Health for All by the Year 2000, WHO, Geneva, 1981; and WHO, "Global Strategy of Health for All: monitoring 1988-1989, detailed analysis of global indicators", WHO, Geneva, 1989.

8/ See WHO, "Guiding principles for national water supply and sanitation monitoring" (CWS/86/6), Geneva, 1986.

9/ See UNESCO, "The UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (FCS)" (CES/AC.44/11), Paris, 1986; and UNESCO, "Background paper prepared for the meeting of experts on indicators of culture, Vienna, 8-11 April 1986" (ST-86/Conf.601/4), Paris, 1986.

10/ See UNICEF, Final Report of the World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs, Jomtien, Thailand, 5-9 March 1990, UNICEF, New York, 1990, appendix 2.

11/ See United Nations, "International coordination of social statistics and indicators and development of statistics and indicators on special population groups" (E/CN.3/1989/11), New York, 1988, paras. 30 and 31.

12/ See United Nations, Compendium of Statistics and Indicators on the Situation of Women 1986, Series K, No. 5 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E/F.88.XVII.6), New York, 1986; and "Statistics and indicators on women's participation in the economy", in United Nations, 1989 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.89.IV.2), New York, 1989.

13/ See E/CN.3/1991/20, op. cit., annex.

14/ See E/CN.3/1989/11, op. cit., para. 39; and Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, "Development of statistics and indicators for monitoring the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons" (CSDHA/DDP/GME/4), Vienna, 1987.

15/ See E/CN.3/1991/20, op. cit., paras. 47-54.

Notes (continued)

16/ See United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, "Case-studies carried out by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and on preparations for the planned international statistical meeting on indicators of patterns of consumption" (E/CN.3/1991/21), New York, 1990.

17/ See, for example, R. Johnston and D. O'Brien, "International cooperation on a framework for the integration of social, demographic, and related economic statistics", in C. Taylor, ed., op. cit., pp. 69-72.

18/ See D. Ghai, M. Hopkins and D. McGranahan, "Some reflections on human and social indicators for development", United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Discussion Paper No. 6, Geneva, October 1988, pp. 7 and 8.

19/ See, for example, World Bank, "Report of the World Bank on progress made in implementing the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) and the Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) project" (E/CN.3/1991/27), New York, 1991; C. Grootaert and R. Kanbur, Policy-Oriented Analysis of Poverty and the Social Dimensions of Structural Adjustment, SDA Working Paper Series, World Bank, Washington, DC, 1990; and R. Chander, C. Grootaert and G. Pyatt, Living Standards Surveys in Developing Countries, LSMS Working Paper No. 1, World Bank, Washington, DC, 1980.

20/ See UNDP, Development without Poverty, a report prepared for the Second Regional Conference on Poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean, held at Quito, 20-23 November 1990, chaps. 1 and 2.

21/ In other words, when counting up the total number of poor households, the overlap of families that are deemed poor by both income and basic needs criteria should be subtracted from the total of both classifications.

22/ See D. Ghai et al., op. cit., p. 9.

23/ See UNDP, op. cit., paras. 99-107.

24/ See, for example, UNDP, Human Development Report 1990, Oxford University Press, New York, 1990, chap. 1.